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STUDIO 21 - A NEW SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT THOUGHT

Michele Rusk

It may no longer be possible to plan future strategies effectively, given the changing nature of the economy, the political landscape, and the speed of these changes in cities around the world (Friendman, 1973). The fundamental challenge is how to equip future leaders with the imagination to innovate, the professionalism to perform, and the openness to collaborate: leading to change – adept organisations and systems (Moss Kanter, 1997). True learning is predicated on advances in knowledge and its transfer and this relies on insightful pedagogy and curriculum development, based on the integration and convergence of the three pillars of academia namely: research; teaching & learning; and professional practice. Thus educational development per se can be viewed as a whole system of knowledge creation, exchange and application.

The importance of problem based; technology enhanced; and collaborative learning is well understood, but for Design Management, specifically, we first need to know how knowledge is generated and learning occurs in this domain. The preferred pedagogical approach of design educators is constructive and consequently the studio exemplifies an interactive environment of knowledge building, experimentation and discovery of principles. Design studio practice encourages the exploration of new concepts enabling practitioners to create and innovate; present and discuss; critically review and evaluate own and others work . Thus studio practice encourages collaboration and shared experience of ideas as well as encouraging reflection, peer review and evaluation (Cross, 1982/2006). The notion of threshold concepts as learning outcomes of 'seeing things in a new way' may be central in this regard. Threshold concepts are conceived of as 'webs' of concepts that have a role in the integration of new ideas into existing individual belief systems (Meyer & Land, 2006).

Reinventing what management education can be involves taking a fresh approach to how leaders learn and practice management. Consequently, management pedagogy needs to engage with new organisational frameworks that rely on open source (Steinberg 2005) and connected collaborative processes (Mulgan, 1997). Design Schools represent a distinctive resource not only as generators of knowledge but also powerful players that have a direct bearing on sustainability through stimulating connections (Manzini, 2011). In design the studio occupies a space of possibility where hands-on, experiential, problem-based learning is possible. Studio practice should inform new management education approaches that are based on design sensibility yet goes beyond the conventional sense of design thinking and practice; to encompass change and synthesise new knowledge from many different disciplines so as to better tackle complex socio-economic issues. This approach would enable future leaders gain sufficient insight to engage authenticity with difficult live issues; then marshal their thoughts into new ways of knowing. In this way studio practice and design methods could be the catalyst to create new dynamic strategic models for creative venturing and avenues for effectuating.

Studio 21 - A New School of Management Thought

'If we change our attitudes, our habits and the ways of some of our organisations it can be an age of new discovery, new enlightenment and new freedom, an age of true learning' (Handy, 1989)

Introduction

This paper focuses on Northern Ireland, where the conversation on conflict transformation runs concurrently with building for the future – literally and metaphorically. Belfast's Cathedral Quarter is being regenerated as the new cultural heart of the city and consequently hub for creative enterprises. The area is the traditional home of the Belfast School of Art, and the location for University of Ulster's new urban campus. This together with the Art School's role as a catalyst for Creative Industries makes the University and its students literally at the heart of rejuvenation and cultural change.

The paper examines the role of design as a meta-skill essential to enabling creative entrepreneurial leadership. It explores design based studio participation as a means of creating new routes for venturing and transformational leadership. The paper concentrates on studio methodology as a different way of responding, not only to managerial decision – making, but to problem framing and solving for innovation per se.

Reinventing what management education can be involves taking a fresh approach to how leaders learn and practice management. Consequently, management pedagogy needs to engage with new organisational frameworks that rely on open source (Steinberg 2005) and connected collaborative processes (Mulgan, 1997). Design Schools represent a distinctive resource not only as generators of knowledge but also powerful players that have a direct bearing on sustainability through stimulating connections (Manzini, 2011). In design the studio occupies a space of possibility where hands-on, experiential, problem-based learning is possible. Studio practice should inform new management education approaches that are based on design sensibility yet goes beyond the conventional sense of design thinking and practice; to encompass change and synthesise new knowledge from many different disciplines so as to better tackle complex socio-economic issues. This approach would enable future leaders gain sufficient insight to engage authenticity with difficult live issues; then marshal their thoughts into new ways of knowing. In this way studio practice and design methods could be the catalyst to create new dynamic strategic models for creative venturing and avenues for effectuating.

Current Context

As far back as 2004 DCMS set up a Forum to explore the relationships between HE/FE and the creative industries with a focus on graduate entrepreneurship for the creative industries. The Task Group's findings showed, very clearly, the high dependency on graduates in the creative industries.

- 43% of the work force in the creative industries in the UK are graduates, compared with 16% in the workforce as a whole.
- 42% of the graduates from the creative disciplines become self-employed
- 37% of self-employed graduates are from the creative disciplines.

One of the four main issues and recommendations was identified as investment in curriculum innovation: Real change would occur if HEIs generated curriculum innovations. However there were very real tensions between the provision of learning programmes to develop a student's creativity, and the provision of learning for employment. Higher education lacked specific incentives to pay attention to graduate entrepreneurship as a curriculum offering. There was consensus within key research into the development of creative enterprises (Ball, 1999; Bouette, 2002; Wedgewood, 2006; Press, 1997) that in order to promote and underpin the development and sustainability of creative companies a need existed for specialist advice and support which was empathetic with the notion of creative driven companies.

Later research (DCMS, DTI, 2010) was illuminating and showed, that creative industries are made up of a large proportion of small companies, highly networked often operating around projects. In the UK this value and economic impact of the cultural economy and the creative industries is becoming increasingly recognised. Made up of 20 or so sub-sectors, the sector is identified as the fastest growing area of the economy in the UK, contributing 1.4 billion to the balance of trade (twice that of the pharmaceutical industry), 8% of GDA and 7.9% of GDP. The creative industries therefore produce almost £1 in £12 of UK total GDP, employ almost 2 million people and account for 7% of total employment – 20% if tourism, hospitality and sport are included. Globally the creative industries account for 7% of GDP and are growing at the rate of 10% a year. Crucially, the design sector in the UK is the second largest in the world and the largest design industry in Europe.

Yet in Northern Ireland there are still too few systematic opportunities for the students or graduates to prepare for creative employment or entrepreneurship. Despite the University's core aim to 'Establish the University as a sector leader in promoting creativity and innovation'. And the much-quoted Cox Review saying 'Creativity, properly employed, carefully evaluated, skilfully managed and soundly implemented, is a key to future business success – and to national prosperity.' (Cox, 2005)

In view of this, last autumn the Northern Ireland Assembly was briefed by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure on stimulating support for the creative economy and social innovation with reference to the three main themes of knowledge generation, knowledge exchange and knowledge exploitation. Underpinned by collaboration at all levels of society, the strategy aims to effect cultural change through creativity and innovation. It sites creativity as the driver of innovation when creativity is shaped and supported by design to deliver economic and social value (McGowan, 2013).

Good strategies are needed to plan all our futures for "where there is no vision the people perish". But strategies, however good, can never be an end in themselves, - How best then to implement? That is the crucial question.

New School of Thought

It has long been recognised that strategy implementation can prove to be a much more onerous task than actually crafting the strategy in the first place, but more fundamentally it may no longer be possible to plan future strategies effectively, given the changing nature of the economy, the political landscape, and the speed of these changes in cities around the world (Friendman, 1973). The fundamental challenge is how to equip future leaders with the

imagination to innovate, the professionalism to perform, and the openness to collaborate: leading to change—adept organisations and systems (Moss Kanter, 1997).

True learning is predicated on advances in knowledge and its transfer and this relies on insightful pedagogy and curriculum development, based on the integration and convergence of the three pillars of academia namely: research; teaching & learning; and professional practice. Thus educational development per se can be viewed as a whole system of knowledge creation, exchange and application; intrinsically linked to other aspects of socio-economic and cultural regional development.

The importance of problem based; technology enhanced; and collaborative learning is well understood, but for Design, specifically, we first need to know how knowledge is generated and learning occurs in this domain. The preferred pedagogical approach of design educators is constructive and consequently the studio exemplifies an interactive environment of knowledge building, experimentation and discovery of principles. Design studio practice encourages the exploration of new concepts enabling practitioners to create and innovate; present and discuss; critically review and evaluate own and others work. Thus studio practice encourages collaboration and shared experience of ideas as well as encouraging reflection, peer review and evaluation (Cross, 1982/2006). The notion of threshold concepts as learning outcomes of ‘seeing things in a new way’ may be central in this regard. Threshold concepts are conceived of as ‘webs’ of concepts that have a role in the integration of new ideas into existing individual belief systems (Meyer & Land, 2006).

Pivotal Role of the Design School

Belfast School of Art knows better than most how to keep the raft of creativity afloat in a sea of turmoil. Established 165 years ago, just after the Royal College, as a founding establishment of the British Art and Design School system; throughout the past 30 years of civil unrest, euphemistically termed “the troubles”, the Art College as it was known, provided safe haven for many to imagine, create and build.

In the context of the University of Ulster’s development plans for a new urban campus and its on-going commitment to SME development, the staff and student community are placed at the heart of rejuvenation and community change in Belfast. Consequently, the Art School is centrally positioned as an agent for sustainable change within the ‘living lab’ of Northern Ireland. This prompted an investigation into the role of Strategic Design - defined as giving form to decision making (Steinberg, 2010); a shift to systems, services and networked design processes (Manzini, 2011) in socio- economic entrepreneurship.

Coupled with these developments and as a result of the experience of engaging in collective and collaborative socio- economic development activities during our Capital of Culture bids; robust, dynamic, multifaceted networks have been established. Consequently, in this place, at this time Belfast can be viewed as a microcosm with distinct advantages in term of scale, small enough and sufficiently networked to be, in effect, a test bed. This connectedness fundamentally affects communities, harness all stakeholder and decision makers and bring dynamic leaders to the fore; giving a mandate to decision makers, a voice to individuals and significantly empowering desperate groups with a determination to be heard and a

preference for positive creative action.

The experiential lessons learned during the wholesale engagement with both Capital of Culture initiatives served in essence as participatory action research yielding 'rules of thumb' for development practice wholesale. Consequently, Belfast School of Art represents an ideal platform for a dynamic system where design is central to setting directions that result in original strategies and innovative action.

The work of positioning the Belfast School of Art as an enabler of change means harnessing design sensibilities to create new ways to gain insight by looking at design and studio practice from first principles. This entails fostering creative competencies that facilitate design led leadership skills including the ability to appreciate the 'big picture' and articulate the architecture of multifaceted problems from the outset. Before we can do that we need to better understand the role of design in generating alternatives and providing integrated solutions through the appreciation of complex motivational factors, then anticipation and visualisation for new scenario building.

Design School as Creative Enterprise Hub

Given that the skills needed to navigate rapidly changing realities must entail coping strategies that have a breath of scope, embrace plasticity and recognise the dynamic nature of the forces at play in shaping all our futures; the challenge for leaders and strategists in emerging cultural contexts is to articulate and draw on a philosophy of global relevance - fit for our time and beyond.

Design is nothing if not a meta-skill, the enabler that makes tangible the possible, while it is design thinking that is the cognitive aid to dealing with the flux of events and adapting accordingly. In essence, design is a source of new insights, new knowledge, and new understanding. Design sensibility advocates a strategic design approach that joins up and re-mixes to find new way to unlock creativity for the cultural shift needed for socio-economic sustainability and renewal.

At Belfast School of Art our response to exploring this rich, still largely untapped, line of inquiry is to harness design to stimulate knowledge sharing, learning and change so as to enable dynamic innovation in its broadest sense. Our approach is to facilitate issue-facing, design led response teams that constitute communities of inquiry learning and practice, proactively engaged in identifying, articulating and providing tangible solutions to a given problem.

Our overarching aim being to play a leading part in the implementation of socio- economic and cultural development strategies for the benefit of the region and beyond. We see our unique contribution as building a firm foundation for creative industries in Northern Ireland through research, development and curriculum innovation.

In practice this means creating different routes to graduate creative entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship; drawing on design methodology to look at innovation differently so as to provide new ways of fostering creative enterprise development, sustainability and leadership

This has meant a bottom-up, studio based approach in 2 distinct areas.

- I. Trial creative enterprise is now an established option for undergraduates through

- 'Co- Create' a new self- employed placement scheme.
2. Belfast School of Art joined forces with the Ulster Business School to introduce a new MSc in Management in Creative Industries

'Co- Create':

At the undergraduate level we have used the existing Industrial Placement Scheme to establish an innovative new self-employed work placement initiative called 'Co- Create', that aims essentially to begin to initiate a community of practice (Wenger 2000) of creative social entrepreneurs that draws on Design School studio methodologies as a catalyst for transformative change (Rusk, 2011).

'Co- Create', a trial business start -up option, was originally created for undergraduate Graphic Design & Illustration students prior to their final year. It was piloted in 2011/12 and subsequently, student participation has grown year on year. It has expanded throughout the Belfast School of Art and beyond to the Ulster Business School. The initiative employs a democratic ethos of student, staff and stakeholder engagement that facilitates student ownership of their creative venturing. It is predicated on identifying, and mapping the architecture of problems, then designing novel solutions through Creative Innovation & Entrepreneurship; Design Leadership & Management; and Strategic Design for Social Change.

The programme supports undergraduates while they try out their business ideas by providing a series of Strategic Design Labs that focus on connecting, enabling and empowering students to create their own futures. This approach is based on collaborative team dynamics, establishing group brand identity and allocation of individual roles and responsibilities so that students can collaboratively arrive at solutions and innovations. Thus, the method essentially harnesses studio practice to enable students to rehearse an effectuating approach to socio- economic innovation with respect to solving problems creatively, identifying new opportunities and/or addressing complex issues. The benefits of engaging in 'Co- Create ' are that instead of waiting until after graduation students can find out early if self-employment is a realistic future option.

MSc in Management in Creative Industries:

Designers are increasingly finding employment and career progression opportunities in non-traditional areas like consultancy agencies, strategy, marketing, and research companies, etc. Industry sectors include the Communications Industry and the Media; Creative Industries; SMEs and Social Enterprises; Government Strategy Units; International Development Agencies.

This shift prompted the University's Office of Innovation to set up the Design Direction Stakeholders Forum that included senior representation from Creative & Culture Skills, Design Alliance, British Council, Arts Council and Government Departments. From within the University the Forum included Belfast School of Art, Ulster Business School and Office of Innovation. The remit was to initiate a Design Community of Practice engaged in the holistic, interdisciplinary development of design for innovation.

In addition, over the past four years Belfast School of Art has actively engaged with key design experts including internationally recognised US academics and high profile policy

makers including Sir George Cox and Lord Bichard. Networks with leading international design bodies include, Design Management Institute (DMI), MIT Collaborative Initiatives, Istituto Europeo di Design, Helsinki Design Lab and British Design Council

Benchmarking activities have been carried out at DMI International Conferences and Belfast School of Art representation at the Helsinki Global Design Lab, a Finnish Government sponsored gathering of 120 invited world experts on Strategic Design. This international network has been a touchstone for appropriate postgraduate curriculum development; providing the opportunity for intelligence gathering, the solicitation of expert opinion and knowledge on design education programmes elsewhere.

The result has been the establishment of MSc in Management in the Creative Industries, jointly offered by the Ulster Business School and Belfast School of Art, in 2013

Through consultation with local employer organisations, government development agencies and community groups, the programme provides access to creative management career opportunities by: -

- Proactively addressing progression to creative industries employment
- Fostering sought-after, generic transferable and subject-specific skills required for rapidly changing employment environments locally, nationally and internationally
- Providing live project experience of employing design for navigating complexity in the regenerative 'living lab' that is Northern Ireland

Consequently these new programmes embed studio practice at the core of both student enterprise and management education. The objective being to;

- Develop strong leadership skills and the ability to formulate sustainable solutions in complex environments.
- Enable focused design direction setting that result in new innovative strategies underpinned by rigor, imagination and professionalism.
- Exemplify a collaborative ethos through trans-disciplinary co-creation.

Conclusion

The multifaceted collaborative networks as described together with current curriculum innovation at the University of Ulster offer; adaptive programmes that respond to rapidly changing socio-economic and cultural contexts; safe learning environments for creative emergence and risk-taking; and a framework for effective learning partnerships between academic expertise, clients and external stakeholders.

They harness design to deliver economic and social value by fostering design led communities of practice that employ holistic, multidisciplinary approaches to strategy, design and management in the service of renewal and future sustainability. As such these developments represent an important step in the development of a culturally driven creative ecosystem where design is employed as the animating principle for ongoing improvement in the economy, society and the environment.

By embedding creativity as a core priority and driver of innovation Belfast School of Art is now positioned as a key catalyst for creative entrepreneurial leadership. Our 'living lab'

studio based methodology not only has implications for regional development but also for socio- economic and cultural development practice internationally.

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